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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CACEN

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SUBJECT: ARMENIA'S PLANS FOR APRIL 24 COMMEMORATION, STATUS OF RELATIONS WITH TURKEY

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Summary

¶1. (SBU) Armenian Foreign Minister Oskanian convoked chiefs of mission resident in Yerevan March 10 to preview events planned in April to mark "Genocide Memorial Day." The two main events will be an academic conference, April 21-22, featuring several American scholars, and the April 24 formal commemoration ceremonies. Oskanian said that invitations had gone out to foreign dignitaries to attend the events, but was quick to add that foreign attendance at the events would not be construed by Yerevan as "legal acceptance of the fact of the 1915 genocide," and that it would not be a "Turkey-bashing" event. Oskanian also circulated a non-paper about Turkish-Armenian relations focusing on the border issue, which he termed "more immediate" than questions of history. Overall, he was at pains to stress the need for reconciliation and constructive cooperation with Turkey, where he sensed that some evolution in civil society on Armenian issues was to be seen. END SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU) Looking fully recuperated from his recent bout of pneumonia, Vartan Oskanian led with his main points: 1) that attendance by foreign officials at the April 24 observance would not be construed by Armenia as legal recognition of the 1915 events as "genocide," and 2) that the commemoration would not be a Turkey-bashing event; in fact, there would be a number of Turkish participants present.

¶3. (SBU) Oskanian said that in his estimation things were changing in Turkey. Civil society was more open than it had been even five years earlier, and the process of EU accession promised to bring about further evolution. Armenia expected two issues to be on the agenda for the accession negotiations: genocide recognition and the border issue. The first issue was not only an issue for the Armenian Diaspora, but for the Armenian nation as a whole; the second was of immediate importance to the citizens of the Republic of Armenia, which was ready for reconciliation and constructive cooperation with Turkey

¶4. (SBU) Asked whether Armenia's quest for "historical justice" might be seen in Ankara as opening up territorial claims, Oskanian repeated what he has said before, that any issues of concern to Turkey could be addressed in the protocol establishing diplomatic relations, and that the Republic of Armenia, as a successor state to the USSR, accepted the Soviet-era treaties fixing the current border. As for genocide non-recognition, Oskanian termed this a moral issue that perpetuated for Armenians the pain already felt by descendants of survivors of 1915, but noted that the closed border was a more "immediate" concern. He distributed a non-paper on Turkey-Armenia Relations (full text at para 7) that is aimed primarily at the border issue, and contains the points about Soviet-era agreements remaining in force, as well as a discussion of the founding documents of the Republic of Armenia that are sometimes cited as evidence of official Armenian territorial claims on Turkey.

¶5. (SBU) Oskanian noted that he would be addressing the issue of the events of 1915 in his address to the Human Right Commission in Geneva on March 15.

¶6. (SBU) The Lebanese Ambassador asked if Armenia claimed that Armenians were the only ones who suffered during the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, recalling that some 600,000 to 700,000 Lebanese had also perished. Oskanian said he made no claims of exclusivity.

¶7. (U) Begin text of March 10 Armenian Government non-paper on Armenia-Turkey Relations (please note internal numbering).

TURKEY-ARMENIA RELATIONS

The continuing closure of the Armenia-Turkey border contradicts the spirit of the European Union. It also goes counter to international treaties and customary international law.

Since Armenia's independence, the Turkey-Armenia border has been closed. There has been no land link between Armenia and Turkey - not by rail, nor by road. As far as Armenia is concerned, the border can be and ought to be open, despite the problems that exist between the two countries. Almost every pair of neighboring countries in the world has such problems, and resolves them through dialogue. Armenia has always expressed a readiness to negotiate through our differences, and not turn them into pre-conditions, or barriers.

Turkey, on the other hand, insists on unilateral moves from Armenia. Their explanations for the continuing lack of relations revolve around one or several of the following: 1) the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, 2) the Genocide of 1915, and 3) territorial issues.

1) Nagorno Karabakh conflict

The Turkish condition: The Nagorno Karabakh conflict must be resolved, or at the very least, territories (outside Nagorno Karabakh proper) under "Armenian control" must be returned to Azerbaijan.

Armenia's response: Those territories, acquired during war, now serve as a buffer zone, ensuring a balance, enabling the ceasefire, preventing resumption of military activities. They are all part of a package that has to be negotiated - a package that includes, first and foremost, the status and security of Nagorno Karabakh. Isolating one item - territories - and demanding that they be returned, without addressing the rest of the issues is disingenuous. Further, the Nagorno Karabakh issue is between Armenians and Azerbaijan. Turkey is a sovereign, independent third country. Its involvement in this issue is based on ethnic solidarity. But although Turkey's support of Azerbaijan is understandable, the manner of its support goes counter to accepted international practice and customary law. Even in the case of Cyprus, where Greeks are in strong solidarity with their Cypriot brothers, the existence of Turkish troops in Northern Cyprus has not kept either the Greeks, or for that matter the Turks, from continuing to maintain diplomatic relations with each other, even in the face of the most vocal, visible manifestation of ethnic solidarity by each side. They continue to both voice and iron out their differences. They are able to do so exactly because they have diplomatic relations and open borders. There are many other such examples in the world.

2) The Armenian Genocide of 1915

The Turkish condition: Armenians must drop the Genocide issue, and must halt their efforts in international organizations and with individual countries to achieve international recognition of the Genocide.

Armenia's response: Armenia and Armenians cannot drop, forget or deny the Genocide of Armenians in 1915 in the Ottoman Empire. All Armenians - in Armenia and the Diaspora -- are engaged in the matter of Genocide recognition. That process is an independent process and has a long history, going back to before Armenia's independence. On the other hand, Armenians - the victims of that Genocide - have never demanded Genocide recognition, by Turkey or any one else, as a pre-condition for normal relations with Turkey. Instead, Armenia is ready to take up normal relations and make it possible for the two societies to discuss, differ, convince, agree, argue, reconcile these and other matters between them.

Regardless of historical realities, difficulties, even animosities, the two peoples are destined to live next door to each other. The establishment of relations will make it possible to freely, democratically, discuss even these difficult issues that have been inherited from the past. There are hardly any two neighboring countries in the world which don't have difficult historical issues between them. Yet, none of these has resulted in closed borders.

3) Territorial Issues

The Turkish condition: Armenians must unilaterally affirm Turkey's territorial integrity and renounce territorial claims against Turkey.

Armenia's response: Armenia is the successor state of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. All of the agreements which the ASSR signed continue to be in force unless new agreements have been signed to replace them, or unless statements have been made about not recognizing those agreements. These agreements are still in force and have not been renounced. In addition, upon establishing diplomatic relations, the protocol that is signed can explicitly mention respect for each other's territorial integrity, noninterference and sovereignty.

Turkey also claims that there are territorial claims embedded in the Republic's founding documents. The relevant passages

from the Constitution (which cites the Declaration of Independence just once) and from the Declaration itself are given below. The reader can judge for himself whether these paragraphs amount to territorial claims.

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Constitution of the Republic of Armenia
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The Armenian People, Recognizing as a basis the fundamental principles of Armenian statehood and the national aspirations engraved in the Declaration of Independence of Armenia,
Having fulfilled the sacred legacy of its freedom loving ancestors for the restoration of the sovereign state,
Committed to the strengthening and prosperity of the fatherland.

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Declaration of Independence
The Supreme Council of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic

(Preamble)

Expressing the united will of the Armenian people;
Aware of its historic responsibility for the destiny of the Armenian people engaged in the realization of the aspirations of all Armenians and the restoration of historical justice;
(Article 11) The Republic of Armenia stands in support of the task of achieving international recognition of the 1915 Genocide in Ottoman Turkey and Western Armenia.

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Importance of Open Borders

The importance of open borders goes beyond the obvious economic, regional and security factors. Open Armenia-Turkey borders will directly decrease Armenian security concerns and will create a more favorable context within which to seek a resolution for the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. Turkey, too, will become more credibly engaged in the process and in other regional developments.

Armenians and Turks will be able to together discuss and explore their common history. More importantly, they will be able to transcend it together and move forward together.

The European Neighborhood policy will become truly meaningful and will make it possible for the region to truly engage with and integrate with the European Union, contribute to Europe's prosperity, and become an equal and promising European partner.

Yerevan
March 10, 2005

End Text.
EVANS